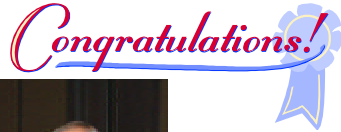




Mid-Region Council of Governments

Winter 2004, Volume 2, Issue 2

MRCOG Recognizes Past and Present Leaders at Annual Awards Dinner



Above Top: Former Albuquerque City Councilor Vincent Griego (right) and his wife Sandra with the Lifetime Achievement Award presented by Executive Director Lawrence Rael (left). Bottom: MRCOG Board Chair Steven Anaya (right) and Vice Chair Gloria Chavez (left) present Mayor Lorraine Wardell (center) of Mountainair a Special Recognition Award.

On August 6, 2004, MRCOG held its 3rd Annual Awards Presentation and Dinner. The dinner was held at the Hyatt Tamaya Resort located on the beautiful Santa Ana Pueblo. The event was an occasion to celebrate MRCOG's 35th anniversary of serving the region. Several key players in MRCOG's early years were recognized with special award presentations including former City of Albuquerque mayors Harry Kinney and Louis Saavedra, and Senator Pete Domenici. In addition, a Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to former Albuquerque City Councilor Vincent Griego. Other Regional Award recipients include:

Public/Private Partnership Award

Estancia Valley Economic Development Association

Regional Leadership Awards

New Mexico Department of Transportation

Bernalillo County

Public Partnership Award

Sandoval County

Special Recognition Awards

Representative Gail Chasey Beam

Sandoval County Commissioner Daymon Ely

Town of Bernalillo Mayor Charles Aguilar

Town of Mountainair Mayor Lorraine Wardell

Moriarty City Councilor Steve Anaya

Congratulations to all award recipients and a heartfelt thank you for the many years of hard work all of you have invested in our region!

Workforce Investment Act News

MRCOG acts as the fiscal agent and administrative entity for Workforce Connection of Central New Mexico (WCCNM), the Board appointed to oversee the region's Federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds. During this program year, WCCNM solicited and selected the One-Stop and the youth providers. New Mexico Department of Labor and Youth Development, Inc. represent WCCNM in the community and deliver services for youth, adults and dislocated workers.

WCCNM's work occurs through three committees and the Youth Council. Committees include Business Outreach; Performance and Monitoring; and Training and Service Providers. Current projects of WCCNM include:

Rapid Response—funding requested from the Governor's Office of Workforce Training and Development to provide dislocated worker services to those affected by both large and small layoffs in the region.

Employer Services within the One-Stops—a series of services designed to increase employer awareness, convene the region's employers and study growing industries and occupations in demand, link to state priorities including economic development.

Ensure Integrity of the Region's Eligible Training Provider List—

This project will ensure that customers and Board members may be confident of the integrity of training providers eligible to provide services to WIA participants.

Serving Out-of-School Youth—This program sets aside funding to serve out-of-school youth, placing a priority on use of these funds to assure youth in all counties of the region are served.

TANF and WIA Co-location—WCCNM is studying how to integrate Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in the Central region, focusing on the benefits, opportunities and challenges of combining TANF and WIA.

Summer Work Academy—This program provides supports, tutoring, mentoring and work experience to youth during the summer months.

Monitoring and ensuring quality of WCCNM providers is of importance to the Board and to the Chief Elected Officials responsible for appointing the Board. Therefore, staff are engaged in evaluating the scope of services of each of the providers, monitoring their performance and providing technical assistance and training in those areas where they need assistance to improve. Contact Adrienne R. Smith, WIA Administrator, at 505-247-1750 or asmith@mrcog-nm.gov, if you have questions or comments.

MRCOG's **VIEWS**

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Gloria Chavez, Vice Chair
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Executive Director

Lawrence Rael



Above left: Locomotive engine similar to the four engines to be supplied by MotivePower. Left: Mock-up of station design for commuter rail platforms.

From Belen to Bernalillo-- Commuter Rail on the Fast Track Towards Success

The commuter rail project continues to progress toward implementation in the fall of 2005. On October 13th 2004 a contract was signed between Bombardier Transport Inc. and the Mid-Region Council of Governments for the acquisition of 10 Bi-Level Bombardier cars. Six of the 10 cars will be Cab cars (meaning they will serve as the cab for the engineer when the cab car is at the head end of the train) and four of the cars will be trailers (regular commuter cars). The contract calls for the delivery of all cars by the end of October 2005, although, the first cars to come off the production line will be delivered to New Mexico in late August.

On November 17th, 2004 MRCOG signed a contract with MotivePower, of Boise, Idaho to build four locomotives for the commuter rail service. The first engine is expected to be delivered to New Mexico the second week of September 2005, and additional locomotives will be delivered at two week intervals thereafter.

Negotiations continue with the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad to utilize the line for the service. An initial agreement between BNSF and the State of New Mexico was signed on September 28, 2004.

A series of public meetings were held recently in most of the communities along the line including Belen, Los Lunas, South and North Albuquerque and Bernalillo to solicit comments on the project and to gather input on station design elements. Draft "mock ups" of station platforms were provided to the public at these meetings to stimulate the discussions.

MRCOG and Vaughn Wedeen Creative have been working on naming, branding and color schemes for the commuter rail service. An initial set of potential names and color schemes was developed. These schemes were presented to focus groups to solicit reactions. The name, color scheme and branding will be announced soon!

Albuquerque-Santa Fe Transportation Corridor Alternatives Analysis

Rapid transit buses? Extend commuter rail to Santa Fe?

These options and more are the focus of the "Albuquerque to Santa Fe Transportation Corridor Alternatives Analysis," a long title for a study that, simply put, seeks the best ways to get between the major destinations in both regions.

An important part of the commuter rail initiative is developing the connection between Bernalillo and Santa Fe. MRCOG and others are pursuing the federal process for this piece to insure that costs for project implementation will qualify for federal funding. The first step in this process is called an "Alternatives Analysis". The analysis began in September 2004 and is expected to be completed in Spring 2005. The study will look at a wide range of transportation improvements in the Albuquerque-Santa Fe Corridor. Key participating agencies include the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT), MRCOG, the City

of Santa Fe, the Counties of Bernalillo, Sandoval and Santa Fe, and our federal partners, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

A final scoping report was submitted to the FTA on October 18, 2004. URS Corporation, the consultant assisting with the analysis, developed the work plan and began research and public outreach in September. Public meetings to "kick off" the study were held in Bernalillo and Santa Fe in November. The next steps are to analyze and discuss the information gathered and to begin the screening process. By late January 2005 another round of public meetings will be held to review the results of that screening process.

At the conclusion of the alternatives analysis, a "locally preferred alternative" will be presented to the public and then presented for

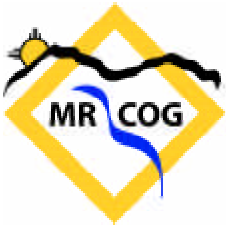
approval by the various regional agencies' governing boards. The selected alternative will proceed to environmental review and preliminary engineering to further refine the selected strategy meeting the long-term transportation needs for the Albuquerque-Santa Fe corridor.

Please contact one of the representatives below if you need additional information or if you would like to provide a comment or suggestion:

In Santa Fe: Pat Oliver-Wright, Team Leader, NMDOT, 505-827-5562, Patricia.Oliver-Wright@nmshtd.state.nm.us

In Albuquerque: Mark Sprick, Special Projects Manager, MRCOG, 505-247-1750, msprick@mrcog-nm.gov





MRCOG LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES for the YEAR 2005 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The MRCOG Board of Directors has identified several priorities for the upcoming legislative session that will begin on January 18, 2005. Our legislative priorities include initiatives that address regional concerns such as transportation, water resources, and economic development; strengthen county and municipal finances; and respect local government autonomy.

The legislative priorities listed below are described in detail with supporting background information on the MRCOG website at www.mrcog-nm.gov.

SUPPORT OF REGIONAL COUNCILS

Policy: Support for the State to consider using the seven State Planning & Development Districts anytime sub-state areas are identified in program implementation.

Policy: Support State funding for the seven State Planning & Development Districts.

Policy: Support Utilization of the seven State Planning & Development Districts in planning and prioritization of capital expenditures

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVENUE SOURCES

Policy: Support State financial assistance for local governments.

LAND USE

Policy: Support to provide incentives to encourage housing and retail development near public transportation stations.

TRANSPORTATION

Policy: Support establishment of an ongoing revenue stream for State funding for public transportation.

Policy: Support incentives for employers and employees to use public transportation for commuting.

Policy: Support legislation that establishes MRCOG as the lead agency for the development and management of a "Pilot" Regional Safe Routes to School construction-grant program for the State of New Mexico Planning and Development District 3 / or AMPA.

Policy: Support efforts to develop regional recreational facilities such as bike, hiking and equestrian trails.

WATER

Policy: Support coordination of bosque management on a regional level and continued funding for Bosque Restoration projects in the middle Rio Grande valley including the counties of Sandoval, Bernalillo, Valencia, and Socorro.

Policy: Support comprehensive reform of the State's water planning and management process.

Policy: Support legislation that would preserve water rights for conservation efforts within the State of New Mexico.

Policy: Support Drought Education

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Policy: Support the Job Training Incentive Program (JTIP) (formerly In-Plant Training) at \$20 million.

Policy: Support a Research and Development Start-Up Tax Credit

Policy: Support Advanced Energy Products Manufacturers' Tax Credit

Policy: Support the Rural Jobs Tax Credit Extension

Policy: Support a Research and Development Start-Up Tax Credit

Policy: Support Alternative Energy as an Economic Development Tool

Agriculture

Policy: Support Agricultural Land Preservation

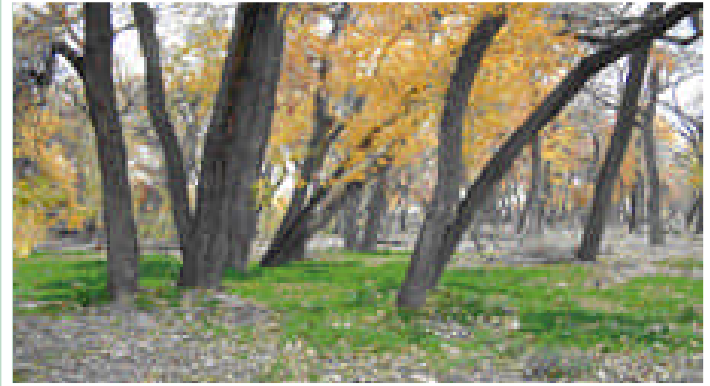
Environmental Health

Policy: Support a Regional Environmental Health Advisory Board to Assist Local Governments in District 3 in Providing Environmental Health Services

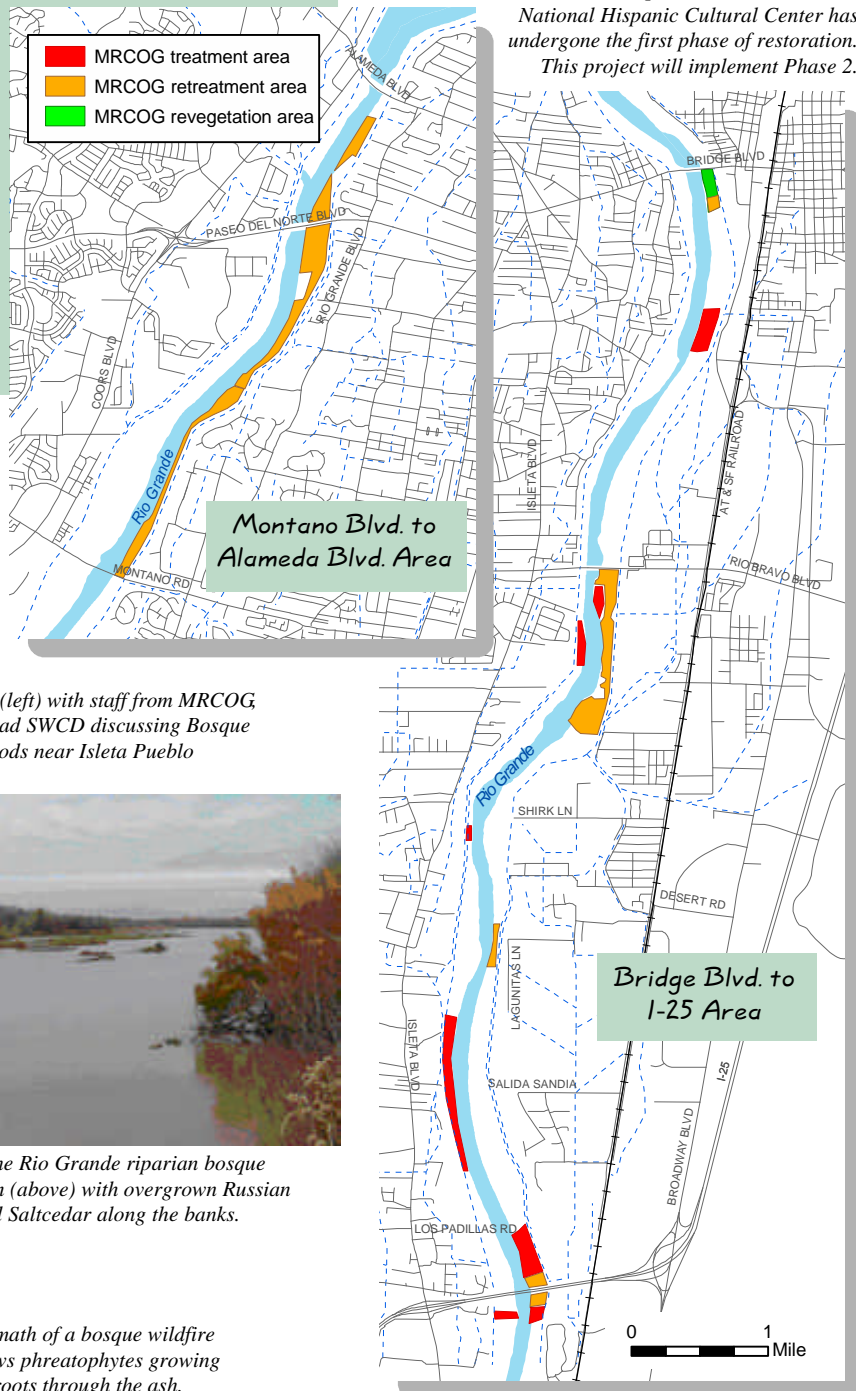
The Bosque Restoration Project

One of the recommendations of the Middle Rio Grande Regional Water Plan is to restore and manage the Bosque to reduce evapotranspiration and improve habitat by selectively removing non-native vegetation and promoting native plants. With funding provided by Governor Bill Richardson, through the New Mexico Office of Natural Resources Trustee (ONRT), the MRCOG is administering a program through the Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District to restore selected areas of the Bosque in the Rio Grande Valley State Park within Bernalillo County. The work is scheduled for completion in February of 2005. Expected benefits include riparian ecosystem improvements, reductions in water lost through evapotranspiration, wildfire management, and preservation of scenic open space.

The maps at right show the locations along the bosque in the Albuquerque area which will undergo treatment or revegetation as part of this project. This work is coordinated with the important restoration efforts undertaken by the City of Albuquerque, the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, the Ciudad Soil and Water Conservation District, the US Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Hispanic Cultural Center.



The bosque site (above) near the National Hispanic Cultural Center has undergone the first phase of restoration. This project will implement Phase 2.



Pre-bid meeting (left) with staff from MRCOG, ONRT, and Ciudad SWCD discussing Bosque restoration methods near Isleta Pueblo



View of the Rio Grande riparian bosque ecosystem (above) with overgrown Russian Olive and Saltcedar along the banks.



The aftermath of a bosque wildfire (left) shows phreatophytes growing from the roots through the ash.

Valencia County Votes to Join the Regional Transit District Process

A regional transit system is one step closer to reality

The Valencia County Commission voted during its December 1st meeting to approve the Mid-Region Transit District contract. By its vote of 4-0 the Commission has joined Los Lunas, Bosque Farms, Belen, Los Ranchos de Albuquerque, and the County of Bernalillo in the effort to form a regional transit district. The final step in the formation process is expected to come during the State Transportation Commission meeting in January. Meeting in Santa Fe, it is anticipated that the Commission will certify the formation of a "Mid-Region Transit District."

2005 Begins Transportation Planning Initiatives

Safe Routes to School

MRCOG is working on developing and implementing a Safe Routes to School (SR2S) program aimed at protecting children from traffic deaths and injuries, and promoting a healthy lifestyle by encouraging biking and walking. The program will integrate safety, health, fitness, traffic relief, and safer and better environments in one program. As a result, children will be able to enjoy a safe walk or bike ride to school. The program will provide schools, neighborhoods, and local government agencies with opportunities to work together to identify problems, solutions and create action plans based on each school's surrounding neighborhood conditions.

The core of the program as envisioned provides for schools and their communities to compete for funds to finance the cost of their SR2S projects. Small grants will be used to improve and enhance the safety of pedestrian and bicycle facilities that provide access to schools. In addition, promotion, education, and enforcement projects and activities may also be eligible when they are related to the overall goal of the project. The small grant program will be managed by MRCOG.

2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan

Initial work on the 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) for the Albuquerque metropolitan planning area has begun. This effort is currently focusing on two areas: One is development of a new set of projections for population and employment out to 2035. The other is reviewing the mission statement, goals and objectives for the current MTP and suggesting potential changes. The result of this effort will be used to guide development of the 2035 MTP. Staff is working with the 2035 MTP Technical Team to develop a draft revision to the current mission statement, goals and objectives. A Public Review Draft will be released for public comment early in 2005.

Valencia County Transportation Plan

MRCOG has also begun work on a Long Range Transportation Plan for Valencia County which will be multimodal in nature and financially constrained. Each of the Valencia County jurisdictions has taken formal action to agree that the Plan needs to be developed and that their elected officials and staff will participate in this effort. In addition, the Steering Committee for the United We Ride project has agreed to act as the Steering Committee for this project also. The plan will evaluate current and future needs and result in a prioritized list of funded and unfunded transportation projects for the County. Funding is being provided by the New Mexico DOT. The initial task for this project is to develop draft goals and objectives, which are anticipated to be released for public review throughout the County in January 2005.



The Manzano Expressway in Valencia County is a north-south route serving the east mesa area of the County.

Welcome to Village of Los Lunas

The Metropolitan Transportation Board welcomes the Village of Los Lunas into the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area and as the newest member on the Board. As a re-

sult of continued growth in the Village and the continued close connection between the metro area and the Village, the Village Council requested to be included in the Planning Area. This will enable the Village to play a role in making decisions about regional transportation issues and to participate in the dialogue about commuter and transportation-related air quality issues. We look forward to working with them.

Local Comprehensive Plans

The completion of new or updated comprehensive plans remains a high priority among local governments in the MRCOG region. Comprehensive plans establish a foundation for detailed community improvement plans and programs. Most recently, the Town of Mountainair has adopted its first Comprehensive Plan and the Village of Cuba Comprehensive Plan is in the final stages of completion. Both of these plans were prepared by MRCOG staff under a Planning Services Agreement. A new Comprehensive Plan for Valencia County is currently underway with MRCOG staff assisting a special steering committee which includes the County's Planning and Zoning Commission. The MRCOG maintains a repository of comprehensive plans for local governments, and provides technical assistance in developing and implementing such plans.

Municipal Water Conservation Project

The New Mexico Office of the Natural Resources Trustee has provided funding to MRCOG for developing water conservation plans for communities in the Middle Rio Grande valley. Three municipalities have been selected for individual assessment and preparation of water management actions to increase water conservation efforts along the Rio Grande. Staff has initiated a process to evaluate water use and recommend conservation techniques in the City of Belen, Village of Los Lunas, and Village of Bosque Farms. The objective is to ensure more effective conservation of municipal supplies in order to preserve the resources of the Rio Grande.



Economic Development Efforts Yield Dividends

High Tech in the High Desert

Albuquerque, and indeed the entire mid-region, has had a high tech shot in the arm. Not only was Albuquerque singled out by the Milken Institute's 2004 "Best Performing Cities" index for its high tech potential, but the Economic Development Administration (EDA) noticed too. On October 11, 2004, the University of New Mexico's Manufacturing Training and Technology Center received \$1,300,000 from the EDA to complete the last two bays of its "cleanroom." That project will enable students both at UNM and at TVI to have professional-grade lab space in which to build competencies in the growing field of microelectronics /microsystems. The MRCOG staff assisted UNM with its EDA grant application.



District 3 Developing Economic Development Plan

The MRCOG staff are synthesizing key economic development efforts in the region and developing a 5-year Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CEDS will provide a framework within which many economic development activities

can grow. In addition, the CEDS is the tool that the Economic Development Administration uses when it considers making investments in the region. Regional governments and development organizations are providing valuable input into the plan, to be approved by the MRCOG Board next spring. For more information please contact Ann Simon, Economic Development Planner, asimon@mrcog-nm.gov.

Workers and students are able to learn job skills and train in the cleanroom at the University of New Mexico's Manufacturing Training and Technology Center (photo courtesy of UNM MTTC).